

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10 OMB-01

AID-05 SR-02 ORM-01 SCA-01 SSO-00 VO-03 /078 W

----- 074292

R 181202Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2987

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEVBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HON

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, TH, CB

SUBJ: FURTHER THAI REACTIONS TO THE INDOCHINA SITUATION

REF: A BANGKOK 6577; B. BANGKOK 6576; C. BANGKOK 5946

SUMMARY: THAI REACTIONS TO THE GKR DEFEAT ARE FALLING INTO SEVERAL DISTINCT CATEGORIES, THE CHIEF OF WHICH ARE ATTITUDES TOWARD CAMBODIAN REFUGEES, THE FUTURE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR THAILAND OF A COMMUNIST CAMBODIA, AND THE EFFECT OF THE INDO-CHINA DENOUEMENT ON THE U.S.-THAI RELATIONSHIP AND THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE. THE REACTION REMAINS LARGEMLY BUT NOT UNIVERSALLY HESITANT RATHER THAN ANGRY OR PANICK. END SUMMARY

1. THE REFUGEE SITUATION: THE PRIMARY RTG CONCERN WITH THE GKR COLLAPSE IS THE INCIPIENT REFUGEE PROBLEM IN THE EASTERN CONFIDENTIAL

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PROVINCES. ONE WELL PLACED MFA OFFICIAL HAS CLAIMED THAT

THERE ARE SOME 50,000 KHMER CROWDED INTO THE CAMBODIAN BORDER TOWN OF POIPET, JUST EAST OF ARANYA PRATHET IN PRACHINBURI PROVINCE. THE THAI WANT DESPERATELY TO KEEP THEM OUT, AND THE CABINET DECIDED APRIL 16 TO CLOSE THE BORDER COMPLETELY. (COMMENT: AN EMBASSY OFFICER VISITED ARANYA PRATHET APRIL 15. THERE WERE NOT CAMBODIAN REFUGEES THERE, BUT THERE WAS A REFUGEE ENCAMPMENT ACROSS THE BORDER NEAR POIPET THAT THAI AUTHORITIES SAID HAD BEEN THERE SEVERAL YEARS. FURTHERMORE, THE THAI DO NOT HAVE THE FORCES TO "SEAL" THE BORDER.)

2. THE RTG HAS ALREADY ENUNCIATED A POLICY WHEREBY ANY KHMER WHO ENTER THAILAND MUST LEAVE THAILAND AS SOON AS IT IS SAFE TO DO SO. THE THAI APPARENTLY HAVE VISIONS OF PREVENTING ANY KHMER REFUGEES FROM PUTTING DOWN ROOTS AS THE VIETNAMESE IN THE NORTHWEST WERE ALLOWED TO DO IN THE LATE 1940. THE THAI CITE ECONOMIC, SECURITY AND DIPLOMATIC REASONS FOR WANTING TO AVOID HOSTING KHMER REFUGEES FOR ANY EXTENDED PERIOD.

3. FUTURE SECURITY OF THAILAND: EITHER THROUGH MYOPIA, A SENSE OF SUPERIORITY, OR A DISINCLINATION TO FACE STILL ELUCTABLE BAD NEWS, THE THAI EXCEPT FOR THE MILITARY, DO NOT SEEM TO BE TAKING CONGNIZANCE OF THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF THE GKR DEFEAT. THE MFA OFFICIAL MOST IMMEDIATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR REGIONAL AFFAIRS TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER APRIL 11 THAT THE COMMUNIST CONSOLIDATION PROCESS WOULD DELAY FRO PERHAPS FIVE YEARS THE DIRECT THREAT TO THAILAND FROM A COMMUNIST CAMBODIA.

4. A GROUP OF LEADING POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSORS WHOM EMBASSY OFFICERS SPOKE WITH ON APRIL 15 THEORIZED THAT THE RECENT EVENTS IN VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA HAVE DRIVEN HOME THE MESSAGE THAT THAILAND HAS FAR MORE TO FEAR FROM THE DRV THAN FROM THE PRC. WHILE THIS POINT SEEMS OBVIOUS, IT HAS NOT ALWAYS ENJOYED UNIVERSAL AGREEMENT AMONG KNOWLEDGEABLE THAI.

5. THE US. THAI RELATIONSHIP AND THE U.S. MILIARY PRESENCE: PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT SPOKE AT LENGTH WITH THE ECONOMIC COUNSELOR GN APRIL 16 AND ASKED SOMEWHAT PLAINTIVELY WHAT CONFIDENTIAL

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HE WAS TO DO NOW THAT THE U.S. HAD WRITTEN OFF CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM (SIC), AND LEFT THAILAND ON THE FRONT LINE. KHUKRIT WENT ON TO SAY THAT IT WAS IN THE FUNDAMENTAL INTEREST OF THAILAND TO KEEP THE FRIENDSHIP AND SUPPORT OF THE UNITED STATES, BUT "NEW METHODS... WOULD HAVE TO BE FOUND TO ACCOMPLISH THIS OBJECTIVE." THE PRIME MINISTER HOPED WE WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO ADOPT NEW TACTICS BECAUSE OF THE SUDDENLY EXPOSED POSITION THE COUNTRY

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6. THE CHIEF OF THE AMERICA DIVISION IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WORAPHUT CHAIYANAM, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER APRIL 17 THAT THE DEBACLE IN INDOCHINA HAD DEBUNKED FOR GOOD THE INDOCHINA RATIONALE FOR KEEPING U.S. TROOPS IN THAILAND, AND THAT THEIR PROMPT WITHDRAWAL WAS ESSENTIAL TO PREVENT THIS IRRITANT FROM RUINING OTHER ASPECTS OF THE CLOSE THAI-U.S. RELATIONSHIP, WHICH THE RTG CONTINUES TO VALUE HIGHLY. HE WENT ON TO EXPLAIN THAT EVEN THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND DID NOT VIEW THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL ISSUE AS AN ESTRANGEMENT IN U.S.-THAI RELATIONS, BUT RATHER AS A NECESSARY STEP TO ALLOW THE CONTINUATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HEALTHY AND VALUABLE ASPECTS OF THAT RELATIONSHIP. HE BELIEVED THAT PRESS INCOMPETENCE AND SENSATIONALISM HAD MISREPRESENTED TROOP WITHDRAWALS AS A GENERAL MOVING AWAY FROM THE U.S. WORAPHUT ALSO MENTIONED THAT THE RECENT COMMUNIST

ATTACKS IN NAN PROVINCE OF NORTH THAILAND HAD BROUGHT THE
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NEWS MEDIA UP SHORT ON THEIR ESPOUSAL OF LEFTIST SENTIMENTS
ON THAI SECURITY POLICY. HE POINTED OUT THE LARGE NUMBER OF
PICTURES OF WOUNDED SOLDIERS THAT THE PAPERS WERE CARRYING
TO BALANCE THE COVERAGE.

7. GOVERNOR CHAROEN THAMRONGKIEU OF RAYONG PROVINCE, WHERE
UTAPAO AIRBASE IS LOCATED, STRONGLY CRITICIZED U.S. POLICY
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA TO A VISITNG EMBASSY OFFICER APRIL 15. HE
SAID THE PEOPLE IN HIS PROVICE WERE CHANGING THEIR
ATTITUDE TOWARD THE U.S. AS A RESULT OF OUR "ABANDONMENT" OF
SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA. PROBABLY EXPRESSING HIS OWN
RATHER THAN HIS CITIZEN'S VIEWS, GOVERNOR CHAROEN SAID THE
PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO QUESTION THE VALUE OF HAVING U.S.
FORCES IN THAILAND, SINCE "THE PEOPLE NO LONGER VIEW THE
U.S. AS A DEPENDABLE ALLY IN TIME OF NEED." HE ALSO SAID
THE U.S. HAD NOT GIVEN THAILAND SUFFICIENT MILITARY ASSISTANCE
TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST AN ALL OUT ATTACK, WHICH HE
EXPECTS TO OCCUR WITHIN A COUPLE OF YEARS. HE ARGUED THAT
THE U.S. HAD GIVEN MORE MILITARY AID TO INDIA (SIC),
VIETNAM, AND CAMBODIA THAN TO THAILAND, WHICH MAKES THE
THAI QUESTION OUR COMMITMENT TO THEIR SECURITY. (COMMENT:
THESE HARSH VIEWS ARE SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE TRADITIONALLY THE
GOVERNORS OF PROVINCES WHERE U.S. FACILITIES ARE LOCATED
ARE OUR STAUNCHEST SUPPORTERS, IN PART BECAUSE
OF THE U.S. CONTRIBUTION TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY.)

8. THE GOVERNORS OF THE BORDER PROVINCES OF CHANTABURI AND
TRAT DID NOT, HOWEVER, MIRROR THESE VIEWS. ONE SAID THAT
THE PEOPLE IN HIS PROVINCE HAD NOT REACTED AGAINST THE U.S.
AS A RESULT OF OUR FAILURE TO HALT THE COMMUNISTS IN INDO-
CHINA; THE OTHER SAID THE THAI STILL HAVE HIGH PERSONAL
REGARD FOR AMERICANS, BUT THAT THAILAND MAY HAVE TO CHANGE
ITS FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICIES AS A RESULT OF THE
INDOCHINA SITUATION.

9. COMMENT: THEGKR DEFEAT, ABSENCE OF REFERENCE TO THAILAND IN
THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH, THE GVN COLLAPSE IN MR'S 1 AND 11, AND
THE U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL ISSUE ALL INTERRELATE IN THE THAI MIND.
WHILE THE THAI ARE UNCOMFORTABLY AWARE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING,
THEY KNOW THEY CAN DO LITTLE TO CHANGE THINGS AND HAVE PUT THEM AS
FAR OUT OF MIND AS POSSIBLE. WE BELIEVE THAT THE FULL MAGNITUDE
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OF THE DISASTER HAS YET TO HIT THE THAI, BUT WHEN IT DOES, THE U.S. WILL COME IN FOR THE LION'S SHARE OF THE BLAME FOR INDO-CHINA AND THE SORRY STATE OF THAI DEFENSES AGAINST BOTH THE IN-SURGENCY AND EXTERNAL AGGRESSION, NOT TO MENTION A PROBABLE WAVE OF UNWELCOME REFUGEES.

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